

Fact Sheet

Research-Based Programs to Prevent Substance Use and Abuse Are A Good Investment for Youth in Washington State

What are Best Practices?

Scientists at five federal agencies review the research findings on prevention strategies and programs to determine which have verifiable results demonstrating the prevention and/or delay of substance use and abuse. These are called “Best Practices”.¹

Researchers estimate that savings from a substance abuse prevention program focused on strengthening families was \$9.60 for every dollar invested (Spoth, Guyll, & Day, 2002).

Washington State prides itself in supporting prevention efforts that have been demonstrated to effectively prevent substance use and abuse. Three nationally recognized Best Practice programs used across the state are highlighted in this fact sheet to illustrate the outcomes they are likely to be generating. The first focuses on preventing substance use by strengthening the family and is called Iowa Strengthening Families Program. The second focuses on school-aged children and is called Life Skills Training, while the third is the mentoring program Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

Strengthening Families Reduces Substance Use in Youth and Also Saves Money

The Iowa Strengthening Families Program is provided to parents and children together. It promotes parent-child bonding, effective family functioning, and strengthens the child's defenses against negative peer influences.

Outcomes for Washington State youth who participate in the Strengthening Families Program are likely to parallel the results observed nationally: National evaluations show that youth who complete this program are significantly less likely to use substances (Spoth, Redmond, & Shin, 2001). For example, in a four-year follow-up survey of over 600 sixth-grade students,

- Participants who completed this program were less likely to begin using alcohol (26% lower than a control group),
- to experience drunkenness (40% lower than a control group),
- to first experiment with marijuana (56% lower than a control group).

In addition, recent national data indicate that the Strengthening Families Program is cost effective. Accounting only for savings based on preventing adult alcohol abuse, researchers estimate that the Strengthening Families Program saved \$9.60 for every dollar invested (Spoth, Guyll, & Day, 2002).

Drug Refusal Skills is a Key Ingredient in the School-Based Life Skills Training

The Life Skills Training Program is school-based and is designed to help students learn to think critically, make independent decisions, resist media pressures, manage common adolescent anxieties, as well as communicate effectively with parents, friends and authority figures. National studies indicate this program is effective in

¹ <http://casat.unr.edu/westcapt/bestpractices/bestprac.htm>

Substance abuse presents a significant threat to the adolescent population, yet evidence-based prevention programs are underfunded and often inaccessible (Physician Leadership on National Drug Policy, 2002).

For more information on Substance Use Prevention, contact:
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 Division of Alcohol & Substance Abuse
 PO Box 45330
 Olympia, WA 98504
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DASA Website:
www1.dshs.wa.gov/dasa

reducing alcohol use:

- A study of more than 3,000 students compared those who participated in Life Skills Training to those who did not. At the two-year follow-up, the proportion of binge drinkers was 57% lower among the participants. (Botvin et al, 2001).
- Students who participated in a combination of Life Skills Training and an intervention focused on strengthening families were 30% less likely to initiate alcohol use than students in a comparison group who did not participate in either program (Spath, Redmond, Trudeau, & Shin, 2002).

Big Brothers/Big Sisters Results in Significant Reduction in Alcohol/Drug Use, Especially Among Minority Students

Big Brothers/Big Sisters is a community-based mentoring program that matches an adult volunteer, known as a Big Brother or Big Sister, to a child or youth, known as a Little Brother or Little Sister, with the expectation that a caring and supportive relationship will develop. In Washington State, mentoring programs that emulate the effective elements of Big Brothers/Big Sisters are expected to achieve similar levels of success:

- In a study of over 1,000 youth, researchers have found that Little Brothers and Little Sisters were almost 46% less likely than their control group counterparts to initiate illegal drug use. These results were strongest for minority youth.
- For every 100 minority girls in the control group who initiated alcohol use, only 28 similar girls who had a Big Sister started using alcohol.
- For every 100 minority boys without a mentor who started using illegal drugs, only 33 similar minority boys who had a Big Brother started using drugs (Grossman & Tierney, 1998).

References

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